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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 003125

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TAGS: [IS](#) [LE](#) [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: CODEL LAHOOD MEETS WITH PM SINIORA

Classified By: Jeffrey D. Feltman, Ambassador. Reason: 1.4 (d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) Calling on Prime Minister Siniora in the Grand Serail September 2, CODEL Lahood expressed its support for Lebanon. Siniora was adamant that the air and sea blockade be lifted so that attention could be turned to the "major political flaw" that Hizballah committed. He thanked the USG for its role in the Stockholm Donors Conference. Turning to Sheba'a Farms, the PM said an Israeli withdrawal from the area would be a great investment for Lebanon and Israel. He ended the discussion with an indirect message to PM Olmert. End Summary.

SUPPORT

2. (C) CODEL Lahoud, consisting of Congressmen Ray Lahood, Charles Boustany and Silvestre Reyes, visited Prime Minister Siniora in the Grand Serail September 2. Rep. Lahood expressed to PM Siniora his continued support for Lebanon. He told Siniora that he very much respects his work and is committed to the reconstruction of Lebanon. Rep. Lahood and Rep. Boustany both insisted that they are did not share the view of Rep. Lantos (who visited Lebanon on August 26) that the distribution of reconstruction aid should be linked to conditions on arms smuggling in Lebanon.

AIR AND SEA BLOCKADE

3. (C) Siniora described Israel's air and sea blockade an "unacceptable and explosive" matter. Arguing that Israel was flaunting the will of the international community, he cited UNSCR 1701 which calls on both Lebanon and the international community to take steps to lift the blockade. He recounted the steps that GOL is taking to secure the borders: 7,500 soldiers have been deployed to the south so far; 8,600 soldiers are posted on the eastern and northern borders; Germany is providing GOL with equipment and assistance to secure the eastern and northern borders; Italian soldiers, as part of UNIFIL, have arrived in Lebanon while Spanish and French soldiers are expected soon.

4. (C) Siniora called on Rep. Lahood to use his contacts and discussions to stress that the international community must do its part to lift the blockade. Israel does not have the authority to act on behalf of the entire international community, he exclaimed while slapping his leg. He warned that the situation is escaping his hands and that extremists can use the effects of the blockade to win sympathy. The blockade is the top priority and is diverting attention from

the "major political flaw" that Hizballah committed.

UXO AT THE AIRPORT

15. (C) Ambassador informed Siniora of a report DAO received that a 2000 pound unexploded bomb was lodged 7 feet under the middle runway at the airport. When airport authorities could not remove the unexploded ordinance they poured concrete over it. Ambassador stressed that if this is the case USG would not use the airport and would encourage others to boycott the airport.

16. (C) In an apparent moment of surprise Siniora assured the Ambassador that this was the first he heard of it and immediately called the Minister of Public Works Mohammed Safadi and Director General of Civil Aviation Hamdi Shok. While on speakerphone both men assured Siniora that all four unexploded bombs were removed from the airport and destroyed.

(Note: Subsequent contact with Lebanese and French UXO disposal teams informed us that this is not the case and that the large bomb remains buried under the runway, though further studies indicated that it is not considered likely to explode. End Note.)

STOCKHOLM CONFERENCE

17. (C) With a genuine smile PM Siniora thanked the USG for its efforts in making the donor's conference in Stockholm a success. He acknowledged the empathy and support that was shown by the international community for Lebanon. He attributed much of this to Secretary Rice. He called the Secretary a great supporter and sympathizer for Lebanon. The

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GOL will begin working on producing results with the money

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that was pledged. He agreed that the process would be complicated because of the restrictions placed on the donations. However, he assured Rep. Lahood that he is determined to rehabilitate Lebanon in a timely, cost-effective, and transparent fashion.

SHEBA'A FARMS

18. (C) Turning his attention to Sheba'a Farms, Siniora insisted that this is Lebanese territory. Syria has a vested interest not to sign papers to this effect because it would affect Syrian negotiations with Israel on Golan Heights and take away a card Syria uses to interfere in Lebanon. He said it would be very helpful for Sheba'a Farms to be placed under UN control until Lebanon and Syria resolve the issue. In doing so Sheba'a Farms would no longer be occupied by Israel.

19. (C) Israel's presence in Sheba'a Farms only serves as an excuse for Syria and Iran to justify their intervention in Lebanese politics. In addition it is the reason Hizballah will use to remain armed. Siniora called an Israeli withdrawal from Sheba'a Farms the "least expensive political and strategic decision with the greatest return" for Lebanon and Israel.

Israeli Soldiers

10. (C) When asked about the kidnapped Israeli soldiers, Siniora stated that he is ready to arrange a deal. He claimed that in the past he made comments, albeit indirect, about brokering a deal for the Israeli soldiers but did not receive a response from Hizballah nor GOI. Siniora is now minimizing his role because Italy, Germany, Jesse Jackson, and Kofi Annan have roles in this issue.

Message to PM Olmert

¶11. (C) Siniora acknowledged that he couldn't have direct talks or a unilateral peace with PM Olmert, but asked Rep. Lahood to deliver a message to Olmert with the "appropriate filters." Force alone will not solve problems. In 1982 Israel entered Lebanon to destroy the PLO, but only managed to plant the seeds for Hizballah. Israel is less secure today. Although Israel destroyed Lebanon in this latest conflict it is obvious that new areas of Israel are under threat. Addressing core issues and being firm is the only way to solve problems. Any progress that is made on Palestine, "the core issue," will help moderate Arabs have a greater voice.

¶12. (C) Siniora advised that Olmert should move quickly to turn the current situation around or he will be the victim of his own actions. The blockade in Lebanon must be lifted. The withdrawal of Israeli troops must be expedited. Sheba'a Farms, the property of Lebanon, should be under UN control. Siniora advises that peace is not a principle of meters of land, instead the boundaries of 1967 must be respected.

¶13. (U) This cable has not been cleared by the CODEL.
FELTMAN